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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD

Written statement* submitted by Médecins sans frontières (International), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 March 2000]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, as received from the submitting non-governmental organization.

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Digno Sepa was 20 years old when he was imprisoned in Malabo in January 1998. He wnas never put on trial, but remained in prison until, in October 1999, after one of the habitual Equatorial Guinea police interrogations, his health deteriorated significantly.

Although he asked to be hospitalized, his request was repeatedly denied, until his family succeeded in obtaining permission for a doctor from Malabo Hospital to examine him. Nor were the clear instructions from the doctor for emergency hospitalization heeded. A week later, when permission was finally given, all that was left for his family to do was to claim the body.

More recently, 35 Bubi prisoners were transferred to the mainland, without the reason for that transfer or the whereabouts of the prisoners being known to date. The fact that the Equatorial Guinea prison system does not provide food or meet other basic needs gives us serious fears for the health and safety of those people, whose trial was a source of embarrassment to those of us who believe in human rights as something more than a declaration of principles.

Médecins sans frontières has been in Equatorial Guinea for 10 years. Ten years, during which our success in assisting the population has been accompanied by the screams that can be heard in the vicinity of the Bata police station.

We have lived with that people for 10 years; we have come to feel with them their longings, their hope, their joy and their disappointments. But we have also known fear: their fear of arbitrary detention, of harassment, of beatings, of their goods being seized; their fear of giving free and clear expression to their desires and intentions.

When we managed to obtain health facilities that worked, we too felt frustration at the fact that they were staffed by people connected to the clan in power, whose only goal was to divert the humanitarian aid that was delivered and to enrich themselves illegally.

Misappropriated funds, obstacles to our work and a total lack of interest on the part of the authorities were what led us to take the decision to leave the country, trusting that by fighting and denouncing the situation from abroad we could find solutions to improve the condition of the people of Equatorial Guinea.

At the very moment when we were deciding to withdraw from the country the Government of Equatorial Guinea was officially congratulating us on our work and inviting us to continue our collaboration under a future cooperation agreement to be signed with the Spanish Government, in which they claimed to include us as the reference NGO.

In Equatorial Guinea children are dying of preventable and curable ailments, the health infrastructure does not offer a minimum standard of quality for the care of the population, and the conditions of hygiene are highly conducive to the development of a host of diseases.

At the same time, Equatorial Guinea gives no sufficiently transparent account of the revenues it obtains from multinational oil companies or of how they are used, and its per capita income is incompatible with the existence of such a situation.

For all these reasons, Médecins sans frontières feels that it has exhausted its role in the field there, and we turn to you, representatives of the international community, to seek a solution.

The passivity demonstrated by the international community to date must, we feel, be transformed now into an energetic stand in defence of human rights, which officially form an intrinsic part of your foreign policies.

Spain has recently signed the promised programme of cooperation with this country. Although unfortunately it seems to us insufficiently clear and resolute, we have been invited by our Government to present proposals to improve the programme. We have, therefore, requested the assistance of various Spanish organizations in an effort to ensure that our Government adopts a decisive policy giving priority to the defence of human rights.

However, we cannot hide our concern that the Equatorial Guinea regime will find the usual bolt-holes in which it traditionally takes refuge when Spain hardens its diplomatic position.

Nor have the Governments of France and the United States shown any zeal in the defence of human rights.

Only last week, in the press, the President of Equatorial Guinea was congratulating himself on the unconditional support of both Governments.

Every statement must be contested, every violation denounced. Commitment to human rights requires something more than signing declarations.

We have just heard the conclusions of the Special Representative of the Commission, whom Médecins sans frontières wishes to thank for the clarity and professionalism of his work and the courage of his reporting.

Now it is up to the international community, it is time to move on to action and not to let a people, however small, be forgotten.

MSF is asking for a forceful resolution that will show the Equatorial Guinea regime that the international community will turn its back on it if it does not heed the clear recommendations of the Special Representative, recommendations consistent with those repeatedly formulated by his predecessors.

There are measures that can be taken before any request for technical assistance is made and that would be proof of a political will that has not existed up to now.

Finally, we request the European Union not to modify or adjust its relations with Malabo, unless the changes we refer to are made.

The people of Equatorial Guinea have great hopes of you, and the problems that Europe is experiencing should not mean that they are once again consigned to oblivion.